Overhearing Chartographers: Voices that Travel

With many thanks (and yearning for a less digital encounter) to:
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NIV

1. Chartography

The book *Cartografía de la voz en el inicio y desarrollo de los Teatros Universitarios en Chile* opens with a seemingly innocent question by its editor, Luis Aros: «Why is it necessary to attend to voice in theatre as an object of study?» And continues: «The canonical answer would be because this, voice, is a fundamental part of the phenomenon, but if it is fundamental, why has it been an *invisible* object in the narrative of the history of theater in Chile until now?»

The voice as ever-present, as unavoidably resonating materiality, as a too much-ness of «here I am» or the dialectical «here we are» / and the voice as already-absent, as having left a body, having left a trace in another body, as moving beyond a «here-and-now» towards a «other-where-and-other-time» or a certain «there-and-then».
This complex spatiotemporality of voicing is one of the core thematic threads in what ensues in the edited collection.
And the methodological framework chosen by the authors is suitably spatiotemporal.
It is a *chartography*.

Aros allies with Argentinian author (actor-director-researcher) Silvia Davini's *definition* of chartography to offer a point of reference. According to Davini:

> A chartography does not take into account elements or aggregates, subjects, relationships or structures; rather it deals with *detecting guidelines*, the crossing of groups and individuals. A mapping includes desire, it is immediately practical and political. A chartography does not pursue a problem or seek an application: the lines that emerge from it may be lines of a life, of an artistic work, of a society, depending on the reference system from which it is started. (2007, 132).

The contributing authors, *Luis Aros, Natalia Elgueta and Consuelo Zamorano,* pursue such a mapping with an insightful dedication to unearthing such "detecting guidelines" of vocal pedagogies in university theatres from 1941 to 1960—and, significantly, with marked "desire".

I was immediately hooked by the opening gestures of the publication, what they did do and also what they could initiate in the vocal imaginary. The use of the word "chartography" in the title, followed by the very first lines of the book, *the questions asked*, merged in my reader's voice and gave me pause. I went back to the title and re-read it as a *question*.
No longer "chartography(.)"-full-stop. But "chartography(?)"-question-mark.

And further questions—or rather, *aporias*—came in flooding:

- What is a chartography?

- Who is it for?

- What does it do?

- Who is the chartographer and how do they do what they do?

- To what end and by which means?

- If voice needs to be chartographed, is it, then, a space? A lived place? An un-mapped or contested territory? A mobile landscape? A fulsome topography in-and-of-itself?

- Is it perhaps a journey, and as with all journeys, too-much-defined by its points of departure and destination but actually occurring in all the points in between?
- Is there anything like a vocal traveler? The one who aims to visit the space-place-territory-landscape-topography that is “voice”? The one undertaking the “journey-voice”? The one who desperately needs the map?
- Or, is voice actually the traveler and the chartographer, luring us into its itinerary and making us think we are journeying towards “it” but, in fact, we are the *topos* and the scenography and “it” is the one that moves, ventures and discovers?

This kind of psychogeographic enquiry lingered well after the first pages. It stuck with me philosophical persistence and accompanied my reading of the work. Aspects of it I want to tease out and share here, knowing very well that doing so is not entirely safe or academically accurate, is potentially too personal and idiosyncratic, and may lead to something very specific and unrepeatable—or something altogether unknowable.

I embrace this instinct just because it sounds like a strategy not very dissimilar to the tactics of the voice.

2. Points of departure

Maps, if they are to be of any use, need to account for the possibility of whole (a geography) and the individual places one embarks from--that one leaves (and perhaps want to return to). They are general depictions that should permit (and enable) personal usage.

In this sense, the book traces a uniquely located history of traditions and conventions in Chilean theatre, of radical changes and revolts, of shifts and breaks, of ebbs of established practice and flows of aspirational new thinking. In Luis Aros's chapter contribution, but also in the second and third chapters, this movement is mapped with precision.

1) The actor that "has" a voice, to whom a voice-object suited for the stage is gifted *like a place to which one has an unquestioned birthright* is replaced by the systematization and codification of voice pedagogy—and training, educational process, study reminds us that other places and other identifications, other trajectories even, are an option, no?

2) Then there is the anatomy-based, scientific model borrowed from biology and audiophonology, and also regularly deployed in operatic singing. This is highly constructed, architectured, human-made edifice that claims it's universal, that all buildings everywhere should be like it, and it can show us how to build them. This model, however, is met with the turn towards the acoustics of everyday life-the realization that buildings and landscapes alike are subject to change, to weathers and microclimates beyond any generic description of atmospheric conditions.

3) The voice working towards (and therefore worked by) canonical texts (and an elsewhere and other-time that is) is reinvented as the local voice of the Chilean realist wave (who, like many realisms do, is packaged as "the authentic flavor of a specific locale").

A first journey presented by the book is the movement of historical interruptions.

A parallel move in the book, a further meeting between two shifting landscapes, is the encounter of this specific history (the microhistory acknowledge by the authors themselves) with voice studies. Voice has always been of interest, and of *academic* interest, of course. But the new discipline of voice studies emerged in the last 15 years or so, as an inter-space, a crossing, as the meeting space:

1) of disciplines usually not brought to dialogue with each other, of journeys and forays across accepted borders;
2) of geopolitical environments that work against the assumption that only Anglophone milieus hold the right to speak epistemic truth claims about voice;
3) of acoustic spaces where different resonances meet beyond what is normatively accepted as how places should sound, allowing the democratizing amplification of the intersections of gender, class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, age and ability to be heard;
4) of different ways of travelling in these spaces, ways which are no longer polar opposites: theory and practice, pedagogy and staging, history and embodiment, knowledge-*about* and knowledge-*through*.

Voice studies dwells on the inter- of such meetings, it is interdisciplinary, transnational and transcultural, intersectional and both theoretical and practical, in other words: praxical. Voice pedagogues now theorise and generate new knowledges. They are the travelers in the journeys of voice who are emerging as its new chartographers—and this is evident across the book. Disciplines, geopolitics, positionalities merge and the writers speak from within the practice of voice.

A second journey in the book is this journey across (and the opening of) such meeting places.

All three authors tackle a third kind of movement too: the re-tracing of a journey already taken. A journey that we can say its complete but which is also somehow part of us, still here. Let's not forget that the book listens-in to voices past (from the 1940s and 1950s) and tries to bring them to our present—or, to give us some guidance as to how we can leave our present and travel back to that vocal past. Consuelo Zamorano gives us a full toolkit, a curious traveller's kit to embar on such an adventure. The first tool in the bag is paying attention to

the overall frame: the *aesthetic* expectations and the texts these voices were attached too. If we know what theatre-makers expected from a voice back in the day and if we know the kinds of language and texts these voices were made to service, then we can begin to imagine how these voices sounded. The second way of mapping is through *reception* in writing: the language, terms and descriptors used by critics: revealeing not only their preferences but, together, making us understand which voice qualities were prized and which qualities were heard as undesirable. Actor-voicers of the day were, of course, aware of the ways in which their voices would be perceived by critics, so some preemptive listening of their own voices (through what these others would tell them about their own manner of speech) must have taken place. And thirdly: a key compass was interviewing actors trained in that historical context and creating the conditions for such memories to become *reconstructions*: to imitate these historic voice qualities as remembered by their makers and their listeners.

I discovered in this historiographic interest a journey parallel to my current one. For the last 3 years, I have also been travelling the territory of voices past through a project titled «Listening Back». The first strand of the project is concerned with the immediate and personal past: the way we narrate the histories of our own voices, the way we voice our vocal autobiographies. I call this *autobiophony*. The second strand, which, in my case has to do with redicovering the vocal qualities of Ancient Greek theatre, is precisely concerned with testing methods for reconstructing and re-listening to voices considered irrevocably lost. I understanding these methodologies as *vocal archaeology*. In Zamorano's chapter, I encountered the meeting point of the two: the extensive number of interviews with voicers from the past—this archive of autobiophonies—allowed Zamorano to think of the voice in the 1940s and 1950s as a whole.

Vocal autobiographies merged to collectively facilitate a vocal archaeology.

Three ways, then, of travelling and three points of departure across the book:

-departing from one conevntion and aesthetic to the next;

-departing from the local to meet the global circulation of research (or vice versa);

-departing from the present to travel to the past.

All journeys skillfully executed by their author-travellers, and all journeys destined to be existentially incomplete.

All journeys that depart, and all journeys that can primarily talk about their departure but not their arrival.

But then again, how can you talk about the departure of a someone who—like voice—you know intimately well; who—like voice—has announced their departure; and who—like voice—is *both* «still-here» and has long-disappeared?

3. Chartophony

A second pursuit embraced by all contributors to the book is the perennial relationship between writing, speaking and voicing. From Derrida to Cavarero and Wongh to Ihde, this has been a road often travelled, but, as the chapters also show us, its chartography remains undecided. Natalia Elgueta ’s chapter, in particular, is useful in revisiting the issue. On the one hand, there is the manner of logocentric journeying: the point of departure is deep internality (the abstract, silent voice of consience) or absolute externality (the overarching linguistic system), and the «message» to be delivered travels on the vessel of the voice only to arrive at another abstract internality or to reaffirm logos. The sea-crossing is pre-determined, the vessel-voice is to be forgotten and what matters is only the goods delivered

(or the overall economy of goods exchange). This has tangible impact: a vessel ready-to-forgotten is designed singularly with the function of goods exchange in mind. A voice that speaks an idealised version of language learns (read here: *is taught*) to only speak the manners of idealised speech. But what if other itineraries were to be pursued? What if the vessel could travel empty, with other varieties of goods, or also served for leisure and discovery? What if voice were to do *other* things, try *other* acousticities, lead to an *elsewhere* of theatre aesthetics? What if the point of departure were the *fact* that there is a vessel-voice, and not that it has to go some-where or deliver some-thing?

In charting the journeys from logos to voice, and all the way back, I tend to prefer the unexpected and the unresolved routes. Prioritising voice/*phone* over *logos* comes with its own system of privileges (I am alreayd thinking of what an insistence on phonocentrism might mean for specific disabled voicers and their participation in the journey). Like Natalia Elgueta reminds us, anti-logocentrism can come in many forms; not just through embracing the immediate materiality of voice, but also by contaminating text with vocality: in this way, the musicality of everyday speech in the 1950s generation of Chilean playwright, was *also* a vocal reform.

Lingering with the tension between voice and logos—not ironing out and resorting to shortcuts—might be where new destinations can be found (and I tend to think that once these new desitnations are chartographed, we need to insist on the tension even more and imagine other maps).

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In concluding, then, allow me to go back to my visit to the vocal imaginary and continue trusting its poetics.

This through-line of the book, this mapping of the *topoi* of logos and voice and their overlapping on the maps, incites in me the desire for a radical chartography of the voice.
When defining chartography the *Oxford English Dictionary* goes for the simple and direct «the drawining of maps»: this a visual definition of an iconographic process.
The etymology of the word, on the other hand, speaks to the order of writing-as-science: «carta» from the Latin for map, and «graphein» from the Greek for writing.
Meaning: The writing of maps. Extending all the way to: the studying of maps (in writing).
This is chartography as visuality and textuality.

But when the journey, like the one proposed by this book, is strewn with vocal cues, sounds, scattered vocal histories, sonic impressions of voice pedagogies, I cannot help but wonder:

What would a vocal map be like?
How can chartography be a sonic or at least an audivisual process?
How can we move through the acoustic geographies of vocal histories and practices with such vocal maps in hand *and* close to the ear?

In my imagination, this edited collection already shows me the promise of a move:
from charto-graphy to charto-phony.
From the writing/drawing of maps to the voicing of places visited.

Whose *desire* is it to follow the new endeavour of such a mapping?

Which new *detecting principles* can become useful in the case of this travel?

And who is willing to travel with a vocal map in hand?

Thank you.

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